

Afterword

Yo-yo Fieldwork

As yo-yo fieldwork is a new term, yet, I would argue, an increasingly common strategy to do fieldwork, I am going to discuss this methodological practice. Fieldwork tends to be hailed as the distinguishing feature of the discipline of anthropology, despite the fact that it is actually the theoretical insights that are generated through fieldwork (and that could not have been generated in any other way) that, in combination with a comparative perspective, is our major contribution to academic knowledge.

How then is fieldwork defined within anthropology? And no less importantly: how do we *de facto* conduct fieldwork today? For at the same time as there is an anxious debate in the discipline about emerging methods such as mobile and multi-local fieldwork, there is an obvious shift towards more flexible forms and methodological pluralism, polymorphous engagements, as Hugh Gusterson (1997) has phrased it. In order to keep up with the mobility and speed of contemporary social life, anthropology requires a new set of methods such as the expanding practice of mobile and multi-local fieldwork. Traditional fieldwork with one year of more or less uninterrupted participant observation in a village or an urban neighbourhood as a unit, does not always do anymore, it does not necessarily answer the research questions that come out of modern social life where so much is in motion.

Multi-local and mobile fieldwork have been discussed and documented by Marcus (1998 [1995]), Clifford (1997a,b), Hannerz (1998, 2003a,b), and in *Anthropological Journal on European Cultures (AJEC)* special issue on 'Shifting Grounds: Experiments in Doing Ethnography' (2002). My fieldwork in Ireland accentuated questions of time and place. At stake were two movements: firstly, the yo-yo movement between Stockholm and Dublin by air, secondly, my moving around all over the island both in the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland by bus, train and to some extent by domestic flights and car. This is a generic multi-local fieldwork in line with Hannerz' (2003b: 21) definition that 'several local fields ... are also linked to each other in some kind of cohesive structure'. This is 'one field, which consists of a network of localities – "several fields in one"'. What is going on in one locality has an impact on the next locality, deliberately or not. And consequently, a multi-local field is also translocal: an understanding of the localities includes relationships between them, as well.

Built around culture theory, globalization, the media and occupational cultures, Stockholm anthropology early provided training in multi-local fieldwork since the communities we researched operated multi-locally, although in different ways. Ulf Björklund (2001) has written about his journey, which altogether lasted for almost one year, through the Armenian diaspora in Paris, California, Boston and New York, followed by Jerusalem, Nicosia and Istanbul. By moving around in these often interconnected circles, Björklund learnt about the beliefs, views, activities, sensibilities and relationships of this diaspora. Aware that he met Armenians in their capacity of Armenians in the centres of the diaspora, where issues of ethnicity and nationalism are emphasized, but that he has not really seen the variety of Armenianness in the peripheries, Björklund argues that his multi-local movements have yet been in accord with the social scope of this old diaspora population. To move around multi-locally was also the best way for Christina Garsten (1994) to study the organizational culture of the transnational computer company Apple. Garsten did fieldwork in three localities: the Swedish office in Stockholm, the international headquarters in Silicon Valley in California and the European headquarters in Paris, thereby covering both centres and one periphery as well as the links between them in this transnational organization. Another occupational culture, multi-local by definition, is the emerging profession of interculturalists whose job it is to teach businesspeople to handle cultural differences. This is the topic of Tommy Dahlén's (1997) study, which was conducted with participant observation and interviews mainly at conferences and courses in intercultural communication, varying from one-day workshops with consultants and big annual international conferences organized by SIETAR (Society for Intercultural Education, Training and Research) to term-long courses at Lesley College in the United States. This is a typical network field where localities are less important. One significant aspect of this fieldwork was that part of the field was temporary, emerging for a short period of time: even though some of the conferences and courses took place with regular intervals, they were not there continuously. Such temporary fields that are connected to more permanent structures are now necessary to deal with for anthropologists, in our aim to make account of contemporary life. So is the occurrence of fields that are temporarily on the move in multi-local fieldwork, that is when a field is moving away for a while and then coming back, as it were. It can be people going on holiday, business trips or other kinds of travel such as when the ballet dancers I was studying in Stockholm (Wulff 1998, 2000) went on tour to Japan, or their colleagues in New York all went to Washington, D.C., to perform. If I had not been able to go with the dancers to Japan and Washington, D.C., I would have been the only one left behind: a fieldworker without a field.

'Looking for a Field' is the subtitle of a chapter by Hasse Huss (2001) about his multi-local fieldwork on the making of reggae music, which was planned as a one local study of toasting (Jamaican rap music) in Kingston, Jamaica, but was to extend to London, Tokyo and Osaka. It was obvious for Huss that he would go to Jamaica, this small Third world nation which against all odds has produced a global music industry. It did not take long before he realized, however, that most people he was going to meet during his fieldwork were part of small or big transnational networks of family and friends. This was especially the case with the music makers. Huss was also struck by

the unlikely presence of the Japanese in Kingston: music producers, toasters and fans, all there because of the great interest in reggae in Japan. And a translocal network took shape with a set of 'deterritorialized common values ... about music and music making' (Huss 2001: 273) reducing the importance of particular places after all. A set of deterritorialized common values were also central in Galina Lindquist's (1997) study of urban shamans and new age performed at courses, parties, and ceremonies based in Sweden but taking her to Denmark, England and France. At the same time, these urban shamans appropriated their own holy places in the Swedish forest for their ceremonies. This is yet another aspect of the meaning of place.

Hannerz (2003b: 18) writes about his multi-local fieldwork among foreign correspondents in Jerusalem, Cape Town, Hong Kong and Tokyo:

A little like the foreign correspondents themselves, I have moved in and out of various places, trying to get an idea of who they are and what happens before their reports about the state of the world reach us viewers, listeners and readers. But besides meeting the correspondents in various places, I have also tried to follow their reporting, read their memoirs and report books, and meet some of the international news editors at their home news stations.

Hannerz (2003b: 18) continues by recalling how different his first fieldwork was, in an African-American neighbourhood in Washington, D.C., in the 1960s (Hannerz 2004 [1969]). That field was characterized by 'face-to-face-relationships' that were managed 'within walking distance'.

This does not mean that there is an inherent lack of face-to-face relationships in multi-local fieldwork. When I went to Ireland I connected to a lively dense network of people in and around the dance world. It is useful and true that many Irish people are convivial and great storytellers, but the small scale of Irish society also matters. I kept running into informants in various contexts that I was not expecting to meet in that place or during that visit. As I was around for so long, my informants included me in their world. They took for granted that I came to major dance events such as local competitions in the countryside, premieres and international dance festivals in Dublin and Belfast. And even though I did not take part in the most mundane everyday life of the dance world, I have shared a little of that too. It did not provide any particularly useful data, however – for that I had to be around at performances, competitions and festivals.

Time and Immersion

It is clear that time is a crucial issue in multi-local fieldwork. A common misunderstanding about this type of fieldwork is that it by definition entails shorter time in the field, at least in each field site. For this study I spent thirty-three weeks in the field, or in all more than eight months. My study of the transnational ballet world (Wulff 1998) included four field sites: one year with the Royal Swedish Ballet in Stockholm, and three months each with the Royal Ballet in London, the American Ballet Theatre in New York and Ballett Frankfurt in Frankfurt-am-Main, altogether almost two years

in the field. Importantly, the duration of my fieldwork in Ireland thus corresponds on the whole with a traditional period of time in the field. But taken together my study lasted over a longer period of time, which is something that Hannerz (2003b) has noted tends to be the case in multi-local fieldwork.

My methodological strategy, to move around the island, to go to different places where dance events occur, was motivated by the fact that dance events relate to each other. An analysis of *Riverdance* required, again, a familiarity with competitive dancing, for example. Importantly, Irish dance people also move around the island taking part in different dance events. By going to Ireland many times over a number of years, I gradually became immersed in my field along a time axis, and can therefore take part in theoretical discussions of the relationship between mobility, time and place. This is an instance of how a field is demarcated by place as well as by the mobility of people and events.

A yo-yo fieldwork moreover allows for time to write conference and seminar papers and articles for publication between field stints, which is useful not least as a way to relate to the academic world in the field. Academic contacts and conferences in the field region add significant dimensions to the understanding of an ongoing study.

A special twist on my academic involvement with Ireland happened when I sent an early article on my yo-yo fieldwork to Anthea, my choreographer friend in Belfast. In the article I talk about how my field was dispersed all over the island, which had me doing fieldwork along the lines of George Marcus' (1998[1995]) six strategies for multi-local fieldwork, or multi-sited ethnography: follow the people, follow the thing, the metaphor, follow the plot, story or allegory, the life or biography, or follow the conflict. These strategies turn out to overlap (cf. Hannerz 2004a): for instance, when I went to Carraroe in the west of Ireland for the dance competition in sean-nós step dancing, I followed dancers and audience, the dance and the competition, as well as the idea of the west of Ireland as a place that still is associated with 'authentic' Irish life. In the article I write about this stint. The next time Anthea was back on the road with her boyfriend, they sent me this enthusiastic (meta)message identifying themselves as my 'field co-informants':

Hi Helena,
Greetings from Gary and I in Clifden/Lennane/Cong/Westport ... between sunshine & showers. We have your article with us and read it every day, although we won't make it to Carraroe unfortunately. We will however walk in your footsteps elsewhere as your field co-informants as this is after all the area where the film 'The Field' was filmed ... how appropriate (have you ever seen it?).¹ We will follow the field, the yellow brick road, the sun rising to meet us (hopefully) and the people, the food, the drink and of course the dancing. We have a short but simple tale of our first night in Westport and the dancing magic (created by ourselves). We will be in touch again at the next Connemara internet cafe.

Regards,
Anthea & Gary

Another important aspect of time in my multi-local yo-yo fieldwork in Ireland is that I made use of the time during my field weeks differently than I have done in my previous field studies. When I was in the field in Ireland I had to use my time even more efficiently than I, if I am completely honest, always did in my traditional field studies. In Ireland I had to push myself forward if I was going to get anything done, which I did. My field weeks were filled with activities, meetings, interviews. Most of them were arranged via email or phone before I went to Ireland, but I tried to leave some space for improvisation, to be able to seize sudden opportunities, which is an aspect of all fieldwork.

A spin-off effect of a multi-local yo-yo fieldwork, where one is not in the field continuously, and which also has to do with the usage of time, is that one gets information about what is happening when one is off-field, so to speak. Such in-between periods of fieldwork, off-fieldwork, are clearly of a different nature than the after-fieldwork state, after having exited the field (cf. Wulff 2000). During off-fieldwork the fieldworker is temporarily physically away from the field, but not mentally. The fieldwork was still going on through my polymorphous engagements such as reading contemporary Irish fiction and watching new Irish film because they portray aspects of modern Irish society that related to my study. Another reason to keep up with the latest novels and films was that my informants did, and then brought them up in conversations with me. My fieldwork was also going on through information and communication technologies when I was at home in Stockholm. This is definitely a new widespread aspect of fieldwork. I received emails and postal mail, both formal information from organizations and also informal letters from key informants about what was going on. I kept up with web pages of Irish newspapers and dance companies, and spent a lot of time watching dance videos that my informants gave me or sent me, or that I bought in Ireland. Watching dance videos is a time-consuming activity, but it was a vital part of my fieldwork, since video is vital in the dance world as in so many other contemporary social worlds (although increasingly replaced by DVD). For me, watching dance video was a way to prepare for meetings with informants who had choreographed the dance pieces on the video or danced in them, to keep up with what my informants were doing while I was away from the field, and to learn about previous work that they did not perform live anymore. I did not make videos myself, however, I only took still pictures.² I was thus documenting a process rather than a slice of time, which used to be the case in traditional fieldwork.

The importance of being there is emphasized in Watson's (1999) volume about modern fieldwork, and this quality is of course central also in long-term multi-local fieldwork. Communication via email, web pages, and video was essential for my fieldwork on dance in Ireland, but it would not have been enough, it was rather a way to keep in touch with the field and to complement face-to-face contacts during participant observation in the field. In my yo-yo type of fieldwork, my repeated returns served to strengthen (cf. Hannerz 2003b) my bonds to the field.

One of the chapters in *Foreign News* by Ulf Hannerz (2004a) is titled 'Writing Time'. It deals with how foreign correspondents write, also in relation to time. Since they are fond of the idea that they write 'the first draft of history' Hannerz goes back

to *Annales* historian Fernand Braudel's (1980: 25ff) concepts of three types of history writing with three different time spans: history of events, medium-term history which covers a couple of decades and *la longue durée*, the time spans which might last for centuries. While journalists typically focus on events, anthropologists have traditionally conceived of an 'ethnographic present' as timeless. Hannerz (2004: 230) discusses long-term fieldwork with continuous involvement and recurring visits in the same field. Even though the actual length of the stay or the number of return visits are in fact not what matters but rather 'a cultivated sensibility towards the passage of time: the medium-term history of the present as a state of mind'.

Going back and forth to Ireland in my yo-yo manner over a number of years enabled me to create such 'a cultivated sensibility towards the passage of time' especially in relation to events in Irish history but also to the economic boom, the so called Celtic Tiger, which I observed almost at its height, and then starting to go downhill.

Just like traditional anthropology, my multi-local study thus has a region. There are similarities with another form of more established type of long-term fieldwork, which meant that the anthropologist kept in touch with the field more or less sporadically for several decades. It was common to spend some longer periods there, and go back now and then to visit. During the course of a yo-yo fieldwork, the field is always present, at least in the back of one's mind. I kept thinking about theoretical questions, planning methodological manoeuvres for my next field trip, reading popular and academic literature and writing about my study. The prerequisite for a yo-yo fieldwork is obviously that it is relatively easy and cheap to get to the field, and above all that the fieldworker is able to arrange life and work at home in a way that makes it possible to go away now and then, almost in a commuting manner.

There is a sense of a divisional nature of Irish society which tends to be traced back to colonialism (see Swan 2005 among others). I did notice social distance and divisions even between people and places that are rather close geographically such as the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland, Catholics and Protestants, Irish and Anglo-Irish, the rural and the urban, yet kept finding ties between them. They were linked criss-cross in various ways on different levels. This can be related to the idea of the village as a unit for fieldwork, or at least the village as a metaphor, to the idea of Ireland as a village where everyone knows everyone. This idea comes out of the fact that the networks are dense and comprise the whole island, and that Irish society is relatively small scale. In a conversation with fellow anthropologists, Frank Hall who, again, has extended experience of research on competitive Irish dancing (1995, 1996, 1997, 1999), he identified the tightly knit and intertwined networks of dance people, musicians, writers, politicians and academics in Irish society as being 'like Celtic knotwork'. I often noticed, with surprise, that people I met in different contexts turned out to know each other, or at least were connected via only a few network links, just like the intricate but inclusive pattern of a Celtic knotwork.

Notes

1. The film titled *The Field* is about an old man in Ireland who loves the field he has worked his whole life, and when it risks being sold by public auction to an American, the Irishman puts up a fierce fight protecting not only his livelihood but also a dark secret.
2. See Banks (2001) on visual methods in ethnographic research, such as video filming.

