Rethinking fieldwork: In search of an anthropology that loses The Time

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Figure I - Some smell of God

Figure II – The terrible golden hands

1- Introduction: about smells and clocks

... l'odeur et la saveur restent encore longtemps, comme des âmes, à se rappeler, à attendre, à espérer, sur la ruine de tout le reste, à porter sans fléchir, sur leur gouttelette presque impalpable, l'édifice immense du souvenir. Et dès que j'eus reconnu le goût du morceau de madeleine trempé dans le tilleul que me donnait ma tante...

Marcel Proust

How to tell about a fieldwork experience? How to tell about a specific fieldwork experience, my fieldwork experience? Perhaps the best way is to describe in terms of Malinowski, like building one argument with the authority and legitimacy of "I was there". It is really a beautiful and notorious work (ethnography), but nowadays it is not possible. Not more, not after the eighties earthquake's postmodern. They taught about the importance of writ, how ethnographies are made from pages, words and letters. Then, I am always constrained about the beginning of a text; I am always looking foreword another way to start. I spend a lot of time of my academic life extremely concerned about this. Now, I can recognize with certain tranquility that one ethnography it is not a product, but much more a process. This process is building with perceptions of the ethnographer, these that are made and shaped with the anthropologist hands and a lot of mouths. I other words, one ethnography is not just the perception of the researcher neither just the report of natives. One ethnography is a work made together and shared (or should be like this), but not just in the writ, it is a shared anthropology in the fieldwork in the terms of Jean Rouch. Another great contribution come of so-called post-socials, they deal with the dynamic idea of invention, but this is completely different from idea

postmodern, this invention is not in the writ, this invention is more real than the reality. Furthermore, there is a kind of anthropology which the subjectivity of anthropologist is more than important and necessary, this kind of emotion and involvement is the heart of research, like the anthropology though and developed for Michel Leiris, a great model of it: "L'Afrique Fantôme".

Therefore, an ethnographic report can deal which a lot of possibilities, if we want, our description, and our writ can be the biggest dream of Maurice Blanchot: the opened book, an opened writ. There are a lot of possibilities, and I think it is not so bad to make *collages*, *bricolage*. Anthropologists could be *bricoleurs* without any problem. Unlike this, to be a *bricoleur* is a great exercise to us, maybe a surrealist exercise in the terms of James Clifford. Not just a *bricolage* of narratives or theories, but also one *mélange* of methods, mixtures of ways of doing anthropology, somehow it is a rich and prosperous idea.

In addition to this, once at Universidade de São Paulo, in a conference, I heard a loveable and inspirited commentary of Márcio Goldman (anthropologist and teacher of Museu Nacional – Rio de Janeiro) about his way to deal with his fieldwork data. Said Goldman that once he returned of his fieldwork at Bahia, state of Salvador, and when he began to reread his field diary (field notebook) an another fieldwork, another place began to be built, a lot of things that he even do not Known began to emerged from those pages. So, a fieldwork can be built also in the moments of reread and writ. Further, he completed that this process involves also exchanges with researchers, academic companions. Because, despite some opposite arguments and attitudes, the verb to share may be the verb that drives anthropology. Thus, the ethnography is a work of *bricolage*,

we juxtapose and sew a lot of pieces of ideas, narratives, thoughts from ourselves and our perceptions, also from our natives and from our colleagues of profession. So, ethnography is done through a process of absorption, immersion and submersion. It is a delicate weaving. To remember Sherry Ortner, anthropology is a "thing of shreds and patches", in other words, a patchwork.

Thus, to speak – to tell – about my fieldwork is a work of reminiscences, memories and forgetfulness. As Marcel Proust I also have my "madeleines", and they come back with sensations, and these memories are made in the present and can change the way - the processes - of my writ and my perception of my field. But it is important to say that these memories and sensations are not just a personal thing (psychological things), these are also social e collective things. Then, let's talk about my "madeleines", let's talk about may smells and clocks.

I always return to my fieldwork through the *souvenirs* that I bring with me, a plenty of sensations. First, smells of basil and myrrh. These are *souvenirs* of the beginning of my research, when I made fieldwork at São João Del Rei, city of Minas Gerais, a Brazilian State (2010), one state of southeast of Brazil. I used to study the ceremonies of Holy Week, in others words, I was interested in the scenario constructed by Catholic Church about the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, so I followed a lot of masses and processions. And in this agonistic scenario, I was really amazed with a whole world of smells, there was a lot of myrrh, incenses and a weird smell of basil next to some chapels that represented the *Via Crucis.* First, I was very interested in scenes, but after this I "looked" around and "saw" millions of lights, smells, sounds. I recognized a mysterious portion of fieldwork: the incredible world of feelings, sensations and emotions. So, those

smells changed my way of seeing and being on the field. And obvious, it transformed my way of writing. This experience was central to a great transformation in my research. I turned my gaze. After this first moment, I began a study closer of the personages of scenario, those devotees and theirs *gestus*, sensations, bodies in the moment of their devoted performance. I began the study of my current interest: people who pay promises. I changed my view of scenario for the actors/personages.

Nowadays, my current research is focused at Aparecida do Norte that is a small city of São Paulo State. This city is called "A capital da Fé" ("The Capital of Faith"), there exists the biggest Marian Sanctuary of the world and it is the second most visited behind only Guadalupe – Mexico. A lot of devotees go to this place to pray and to pay promises to "Nossa Senhora Aparecida", the Lady that is the Patron Saint of Brazil. The month of October is especially important in Brazil because is the moment of party of the miracle Saint (12 October). It is an essential element of my research and may paper, because I was always very interested in extraordinary moments: Holy Week, Party of Patron Saint of Brazil, religious parties in general. So, I was always attached at schemas and typologies about time: quotidian/ordinary time *versus* extraordinary time; structural time *versus* anti-structural/liminal time. In other words, I was extremely focused at opposition between the quotidian time and the party time (the suspended moment: period to pray, to pay promise, period to celebrate Christ and the saints, in this specific case Our Lady of Brazil: "Nossa Senhora Aparecida".

Therefore, these moments that I lived were amazing moments of suspended time. At São João Del Rei – a historic city of Minas Gerais – I was in an agonistic scenario/space-time. At Aparecida do Norte – SP, I also was in a suspended time, an

enormous party of devotion, it is maybe less agonistic, but also a great extraordinary time. Thus, time never was a problem in my research. Actually, time as category always was desired, in other words, schemas and models about time always helped in my research as a way to organize the world, putting each stuff in its place, like cashes that have the power of clean the mess and to keep all the things in the correct place, separating the quotidian time and its ordinaries/structural characteristics of the extraordinary time and its anti-structural elements. So, time was one of the good categories to organize a study about parties (religious parties) and not quotidian moments like to pay promises and periods of religious rectitude. Because, saw like this, time can make an interesting and utile division to organize a research: ordinaries moments *versus* extraordinarines moments. In this way, time as a category worked well as a tool word. Until I face the time not as a tool word but as a question. This occurred at a specific moment, the last *voyage* to my field.

I was on the bus going to Aparecida, that bus living São Paulo – one of the biggest and accelerated cities in the world - and going to Aparecida. For the first time I played attention on the road, the small cities, those small places with another composition of time, because we know that is obvious the direct relation between space and time. For the first time, I felt afraid of being engulfed by another regime of time, another way of perception and experience of time. On the road, arriving in Aparecida, the first thing that all the people see is the big clock's tower of the Sanctuary. A big and blue clock with the golden hands. Already in Aparecida, I was also astonished with the digital clock's plaza (the plaza of Old Basilica). Those big red numbers with that weird time confounding the morning, the afternoon and the night. And it seemed that I was the only person disturbed

with that. Only to me the clock was working out or, actually, I was the only person worried and concerned about time. Maybe, time was a problem just to me; it was not a problem to those devotees. So, the category time se transformed into a problem word. Than, time as a schema or typology became a restless question to me. Thus, I spent efforts to think about time, because that field experiences shook my comfortable perception and use of time as a category in my fieldwork and ethnography.

Therefore, this paper is a aff(li)ective way to share this thoughts, affective because is made about efforts of my body and all my care with my ethnography, my complete engagement. And afflictive because is something speculative, it is based in the data of field and theoretical ideas, but it is before all a speculative exercise of thought. So, it is one *mélange* about affective and afflictive pieces of a big *bricolage*.

2 – Time: a tool word

There is a time for everything,
and a season for every activity under the heavens…

Ecclesiastes 3:1

Not long ago, I came across a text of Gérard Lenclud, I did not know the work of this researcher. So, I was caught of that rare and wonderful sensation of fascination. Of course I have not read all his work, but those few pages were essential things to

reorganize my point of view and rethought my fieldwork and my ethnography (this incredible and monstrous work of writ and to revive my field). Said Lenclud:

> *Il y a des mots-outils et il y a des mots-problèmes. Un mot-outil est um mot qu'on utilise sans trop penser à son sens. Il est une procédure grossière d'identification. L'important, c'est à quoi CE mot permet de vite référer. Un chat est un chat; la Provence a des traditions; cachun comprend. L' usage du mot n' implique pas une conaissance approfondie du référent de ce mot, référent qui est le plus souvent un objet naturel ou (indûment) naturalisé. Un mot-problème est un mot-outil sur lequel on s'est arête. On s'y est arrêté parce qu'on est avisé que ses emplois no correspondaient pas à une notion précise ou parce qu'on s'est aperçu qu'il servir à désigner des choses fort différentes entre elles, même pas toujours pourvues d'un air famille. Un mythe n'est pas un mythe comme un chat est un chat…à condition évidemment que l'on y ait réfléchi. S'interroger, par exemple, sur la différence entre un mythe et un conte ou encore sur encore sur l'existence de mythes dans lês cultures africaines aboutit immanquablement à transformer le mot-outil de mythe en mot-problème. La chose visée par le mot-outil en perd sur-le-champ la qualité d'objet naturel (ou naturalisé); le sentiment d'évidence se dissout.*
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> *C'est qu'un mot-problème signale um concept plus qu'il n'identifie un objet ou même qu'il n'exprime un sens; et un concept se caractérise par le qu'il est nécessairement équivoque et qu'il échappe, par conséquent, à la définition. On peut definir um mot, c'est-à-dire décréter une signification, mais pás um concept puisqu'il réunit em lui une pluralité de significations. Du même coup, Le mot-problème oblige à penser. Tout mot-outil est susceptible de devenir mot-problème; et tous les mots, don't on sait pourtant qu'ils ont statut de mot-problème, continuent d'être utilisés comme des mots-outils.* (LENCLUD, 1994, p. 25).

Here, Lenclud talks about oral tradition, but this idea may help others parts of Anthropology and all social/human thought. So, first, I will try to demonstrate time as a mot-outil. In others words, how that I always treated the category time in my work. Time was a tool category, a tool word: a *mot-outil*. Thus, time as a tool always answered and

organized my questions. For instance: pray and pay promises and the religious parties as a extraordinary time and the life of work and family – day by day – as ordinary time. In others words, I used to do a comfortable and canonical division: structural period x anti-structural period; quotidian time x extraordinary time. Using always time markers like this, inspiring me in the work of Victor Turner: the ordinary moments and the anti-structural/*communitas* moments. I used also pay attention in the moments of passages, following Arnold Van Gennep and his prestigious and beautiful work. Therefore, the moment of paying promises was an extraordinary, anti-structural period, a suspended time that built a sacred place, the place to pay promises. So, the party of Nossa Senhora Aparecida was the moment to pay promises and lead all the devotees to the Sanctuary. So, an agency of word in the moment that a person makes a promise leads her to go until a place to pay this promise. So, a word filled with agency made at an ordinary time (moment of making promise) leads to an action at an extraordinary time (moment of paying promise). The best progress that I could glimpse in this schema was deal with these categories not as a separated part, separated forms of time, but a continuum, idea well developed by the Brazilian anthropologist Ordep Serra.

Cleary, to me time was a tool word, organized my research and the plural moments inside it. I was completely satisfied with this. Also because these were (are) good ideas and because I thought that these authors answered and solved questions. Those were the schemas that helped me a lot with my demands. Until I face those terrible and astonishing golden hands (hands of the clock in the tower of Sancttuary). I stopped and I seriously began to rethink my relation about the theory and the fieldwork. So, a

smell and a clock shook my *terrain*. Time as a tool word (*mot-outil*) became a problem word (*mot-problème*).

3- Time: a problem word

Válido até[1]

Acontece com certas idéias,
filmes, passaportes, remédios,
homens, alimentos, critérios,
promoções, casamentos, impérios,
poemas, contratos mistérios,
carregam de antemão o epitáfio:

Augusto Massi

Time as a problem word is a way to put this category in check. What obvious put this situation (category) in *échec*. To think about time was a definitive transformation in my research. I tried to put my fieldwork inside theoretical cashes, separating and organizing my field data with typological cashes. In other words, my first point of reference was the theory when should be the field. So, I put my data inside this schema: ordinary times *versus* extraordinary times. But, I did not saw this on my fieldwork. Then, I put time as a category in check. John Cowart Dawsey (anthropologist and teacher of Universidade de São Paulo – USP) inspired in Walter Benjamin called attention to the existence of extraordinary quotidian and quotidian extraordinary. It is a great and

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1 *Valid until*
It happens with certain ideas, movies, passports, medicines, men, food, criteria, promotions, weddings,
empires, poems, mysteries contracts, bear in advance the epitaph: Author: Augusto Massi
(My translation).

interesting way to deal with time and to recognize another ways to understand history out of a linear and universal logic. These are important steps, but I think we could find more insightful understandings following authors like Johannes Fabian, Alfred Gell, Roy Wagner and a lot of researchers that work with oral tradition. From these authors, we can see that Time and History are dangerous categories that look for put and study the "others" from categories and remarks those are not important to them, in other words, we study the "other" from our categories and remarks of understanding.

Therefore, I realize that this separation about ordinary time and extraordinary time was my concern and not a question to people that a study. Devotees at Aparecida can access both times without a rule. They can be at the party of Nossa Senhora Aparecida and access their quotidian and *vice versa.* Then, here, the obviation - figure and ground - are the most precious form of understanding, this image of Wagner allows a more dynamic and fluid perception of social phenomena, including time of course. Because there is not one time, but there are temporalities that can be accessed in a dynamic process (dynamic and continuum process of immersion and submersion of times/temporalities and places). This paper is in search a way that does not naturalize time as an occidental category, here, I am focused in temporalities that make movements. It is not important to denominate a period, what can to crystallize and to harder a malleable thing. Consequently, Nossa Senhora Aparecida is the Lady of times not because deals with ordinary and extraordinary times, but because the people that pay promises can access a world of differents temporalities *au même temps* e not just ritual and/or calendar times. And they can also access and build a lot of places.

It is obvious that this paper modified its proposal, it is a risk, but it is impossible to be engulfed, to be caught, for a new, marvelous and dangerous idea and to close the eyes, to close the mouth, to close the arms and hands, it is impossible to close the heart to a idea that pay attention not in the typologies of Time, but that is avid to understand the quality of experience, the expressions of devotees. This paper is in search an anthropology that loses Time to gain/to get experiences. This paper is in search another perception of time and history, without caps lock. An Anthropology that loses Time (typologies of Time) to get times/temporalities. And this reflection does not diminish the work of canonical authors, but this proposal bets on a more dynamic way of thinking and making times, places and Anthropology)

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