

**Report on the 11th Biennial EASA 2010 Conference “Crisis and Imagination”,
National University of Ireland Maynooth, 24-27th August 2010**

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This report focuses only on those workshops I attended during the conference. They all deal with media (technology) practices in/and social and cultural anthropology. For a complete list of workshops and thematic areas, take a look at the conference website:

<http://www.easaonline.org/conferences/easa2010/index.htm>

25 August 2010: EASA Media Anthropology Network Workshop “The rewards of media”

Convenors: John Postill & Philipp Budka

(<http://www.nomadit.co.uk/easa/easa2010/panels.php5?PanelID=648>)

John Postill introduces to the workshop's theme, procedure and schedule. “The workshop explores the rewards (social, economic, symbolic, sensory, etc., cf. Warde 2005) derived from engaging in specific media practices in different sociocultural settings.” (more:

<http://www.nomadit.co.uk/easa/easa2010/panels.php5?PanelID=648>)

1) John Postill & Francisco Orsorio “Mobile rewards: a critical review of the Mobiles for Development (M4D) literature“

In the workshop's first paper John and Francisco review literature in the field of mobile technologies, particular phones, for development. What are the rewards deriving from these mobile practices? In doing so it is necessary to specify the benefits of mobile phones since literature is focusing mainly on financial and economic rewards of using this technology.

It is important to consider the involvement of mobile technologies in processes of social change. John and Francisco propose to follow practitioners of media technologies in multiple ways: (1) as practitioners, (2) as persons and (3) as historical agents. More diachronic studies of the practices of mobile technologies are needed. In a field of practice different agents compete over a field of rewards. Questions for further research include how mobile phone users mix rewards and how they switch from one kind of reward to another as well as how mobiles can be used not only to blur lives and livelihoods (Donner) but also in some cases to keep lives and livelihoods apart, e.g. when a sex worker uses a mobile phone with her clients and another with friends and family.

In the following discussion Daniel Miller propose the concept of poly-media, basically meaning that people on a global scale can now access a whole range of media technologies to communicate. And this is changing the relation between those communication technology and society (cf. <http://blogs.nyu.edu/projects/materialworld/>).

2) Alexander Knorr “Modding's rewards“

In his paper, Alexander takes a look at “modding” practices of computer game modifiers, i.e. “modders”, meaning the modification, alteration, re-construction and re-contextualisation of computer games. Computer games can be understood as (1) media, (2) commodities that are produced and consumed and as (3) technological artefacts. One of the rewards for modders, as unpaid private persons, to work with those artefacts and to spend a lot of time and energy is to

become a developer. Entering thus an other level of technology production and of symbolic and social capital within this field of computer practices.

In the discussion Tilo Grätz argues that the concept of “produsage”, developed by Axel Bruns, can be helpful here (cf. <http://produsage.org/produsage>).

3) Heather Horst *“Youth, Families and Participation in Networked Public Culture”*

Heather discusses digital media and learning practises within two Silicon Valley families. She concentrates in her ethnographic case study on the generational gaps and tensions that develop out of digital media usage within families as communities of practice. Power structures shown in technology usage need to be analysed here in particular. Focusing on the rewards of digital media usage allows to highlight the positive effects of those practices rather than joining in the moral panic discourse about, particularly, youth media practices.

4) Pille Runnel *“Generation C”? The internet usage practices among the young people“*

In her presentation, Pille introduces new results of an European research project on young people's internet usage. By deploying a practice approach, the benefits of internet usage in daily life are investigated. The term “generation c” refers here to content and creativity and is equivalently used to e.g. “digital natives”. Children are involved in different arenas and on different levels of digital media practices: school, leisure, resources/infrastructure and high-use. While social networking site, like Facebook, usage is booming, content creation by young people, e.g. on blogs or personal websites, seems to be decreasing (e.g. in Estonia). A new user agency in the field of new media usage can be stated.

5) Elisenda Ardèvol, Gemma San Cornelio, Toni Roig, Edgar Gómez *“Engagement and creative labour in new media practices“*

This paper investigates creative practices in new media. In doing so, this productive process is considered cultural in character. There are a whole bunch of new concepts that aim to integrate digital media production and usage, consumption, creativity, play, user generated content, etc.: e.g. “produsage” (Axel Bruns), “playbor” (Julian Kücklich: <http://schott.blogs.nytimes.com/2010/03/12/playbor/>) and “mediawork” (Mark Deuze: <http://deuze.blogspot.com/>), etc.

In creating content, intrinsic and extrinsic motivations can be identified. Self-expression, e.g. would be an intrinsic motivation; financial and/or economic rewards can be considered extrinsic. Sociability and social agency are of particular importance within such a practice theory approach. Through different ethnographic case studies the field of new media creation is being analysed and discussed within this historic and longitudinal project, from amateur photographers and their media practices to activist bloggers.

6) Smiljana Antonijevic *“User-generated content and cultural heritage: rewards and challenges“*

Smiljana in her paper asks why engaged users contribute to content generation. There are different rewards that can be identified, e.g.: peer recognition, self-expression, skill development and empowerment. Those are connected to similar needs.

In the case of cultural heritage content generation, users are increasingly contributing e.g. by social tagging, commenting and even modifying. These user practices hold benefits, e.g. online content

dynamisation and better understanding of culture, and challenges, e.g. not verifiable knowledge and user labour. Challenges and benefits have to be kept in balance by e.g. empowering and involving social agents and communities.

7) *Elke Mader “My name is Khan: crisis, media and imagination“*

Media practices in the context of Bollywood fan culture are analysed in Elke's contribution. In starting from a particular media event, namely the controversial reception and discussion of the Shah Rukh Khan movie “My name is Khan”, she discusses different media practices and how they are interrelated and bound together in twitter. The micro-blogging technology twitter in this case is mainly used to support and strengthen SRK and his point of view.

8) *Philipp Budka “Popular culture and music in an indigenous online environment“*

Philipp introduces the indigenous internet service MyKnet.org (<http://myknet.org/>) and how young people utilise hip hop cultural elements in this environment to construct and negotiate their online presences and thus their social and cultural identities. Drawing from literature and this case study, he discusses rewards that derive from the practice of homepage production and how they can be contextualised and categorised within a practice theory approach.

9) *Tilo Grätz “Radio Stars in Benin (West Africa)“*

In the workshop's last paper, Tilo investigates radio production practices in Benin. There, radio, as the most important mass medium, is a critical voice and an example for the localisation of media production. Radio shows, particular call-in-shows, experienced a boom after the mobile phone has been widely distributed and used in the region. This might be explained through the increasing “technological closeness” (cf. Stefan Beck).

26 August 2010: Workshop “Digital Anthropology”

Convenors: Daniel Miller & Heather Horst

(<http://www.nomadit.co.uk/easa/easa2010/panels.php5?PanelID=599>)

Introduction to the workshop by Daniel Miller. “How can anthropology contribute to an understanding of the impact of new digital technologies? This session explores topics ranging from how digital technologies become part of everyday life to their role in the development of new infrastructures within both commerce and the state.” (more:

<http://www.nomadit.co.uk/easa/easa2010/panels.php5?PanelID=599>)

1) *Daniel Miller & Heather Horst “A brief theory of digital anthropology“*

Daniel gives an introduction to the theory of digital anthropology by presenting the study program for digital anthropology at the University College London and two ethnographic case studies. The first project investigates the changing relationship between migrant mothers working in England and their children living in the Philippines. Through “poly-media”, meaning the potential access to a whole range of communication media, this relationship and the function as mother are changing. In the second project, Daniel explores the social networking site Facebook in the case of Trinidad. Digital anthropology should contribute to the understanding of today's humanity, which lies at the core of the anthropological project.

By referring to the concept of “networked publics”, created through digital media, Heather reminds us about the importance of ethical issues in a “poly-media” world. Within digital anthropology, methodological and epistemological specifications, like ethnography, need to be considered and further developed.

2) *Andrew Bowsher “Digital sound technologies: the renegotiation of music production, consumption and collecting practices”*

By taking a historical approach, Andrew discusses digital sound technologies through practice theory and an ethnographic case study in Austin, Texas. Objects, such as digital music media, are cultural artefacts that are also commodities and pieces of information. He nicely demonstrates how producers of those artefacts are manufacturing authenticity for consumers.

3) *Gabrielle Coleman “Anonymous vs. the Church of Scientology”*

Gabrielle gives a very interesting presentation on the war between “anonymous” and the church of scientology, which is going on now for two decades in a highly mediated manner. Anonymous trolls are attacking scientology with video memes, public messages and other means of political activism. Those activists can thus also be understood as tricksters playing tricks and disobeying rules and norms.

4) *Lane DeNicola “Spimes as material culture: anthropological approaches to (and through) location-aware objects”*

In his paper, Lane utilises the notion of “spimes”, which was coined by science fiction author Bruce Sterling, as material culture to analyse location-aware and connected objects. Those technological connected objects begin to constitute what is being called the “internet of things”. Apple's iPhone, for instance, is such an object that comes with the following spime qualities: (1) uniquely identifiable, (2) connected to a (global) network and (3) a recorded location (through GPS). Issues of surveillance have to be considered here, as e.g. the case of Google StreetView demonstrates.

5) *Discussion*

In a first round of discussion it is broad forward that instead of asking the question “what is the internet?”, one (anthropologists) should ask how people derive meaning out of it. Miller argues that this could best be done through “extreme” stages of internet usage (cf. “Ethnography and the extreme Internet” by Miller & Slater in Eriksen “Globalisation” 2003).

6) *Peter Pels & Chris Goto-Jones “A history of the politics of digital futurities”*

Peter presents a larger project that is going to investigate the inter-mediality in discourses about science fiction and development. Within this frame, several ethnographic studies deal with “mediated globalised futures”. One project, e.g. takes a historical approach by discussing world's fair and its artefacts, such as the IBM pavilion at the 1964 New York World's Fair), as science fiction futurities.

7) *Bart Barendregt “Emerging futurities in Muslim southeast Asia: science fantasy, digital development and the urge for moral technology”*

In his paper, Bart discusses the fairness in information technology, e.g. green IT and activisms (ICT

for development) in the specific context of Southeast Asia and in particular Indonesia. The politics and economy of mobile phones are in the centre of interest by investigating how “Muslim futurities” are generated through “Muslim technologies”. Technology, in this case, is religious as well as non-religious. There is for instance a Muslim Facebook clone.

8) *Paula Uimonen “Digital dramas, online liminality and the state of creolization in Tanzania”*

Paula analyses the transformative changes to institutions and organisations through digital media technologies by looking at the case of a Tanzanian art school. She deploys different theoretical concepts to accomplish that: (1) Turner's social drama and its liminal character, meaning the phase of being betwixt and between stages; liminality here should allow for capturing the here and there as co-existing stages. (2) Liminality as creolisation in Hannerz's sense as unstable, highly dynamic and constantly moving state. And (3) Latour's concept of “composition” (cf. e.g. <http://vimeo.com/10181984>).

9) *Julie Archambault “Phones, foreigners, and the fluctuating digital divide in Southern Mozambique”*

In her presentation, Julie investigates mobile phones as objects of theft. An apparently common petty crime among male youth in her field site in Mozambique. This practice, that maybe illegal but not illicit, creates a circulation of technological artefacts, i.e. mobile phones. Theft can thus be understood as generative practice (cf. Larkin).

10) *Discussion*

Again a round of discussion is following the presentations. In using Turner's concept of “social drama” in a digital technology context, Pfaffenberger's “technological drama” might be helpful to consider here too. Also the temporal aspect of liminality is crucial and should therefore not be forgotten.

11) *Sirpa Tenhunen “Culture, conflict and translocal communication: mobile technology and politics in rural West Bengal, India”*

Sirpa in her paper investigates mobile phone practices in relation to politics, activism and violence in the West Bengal context.

12) *Lee Komito “Migration and virtual community 2.0”*

Lee's paper builds on a project that asked about the impact of social media on migrants. He finds that migrants in Ireland are using internet technologies and applications in a more intense way than the Irish do. This is in particular to keep contact to homeland relatives and friends. Could this be an indication for “the return of the virtual community – that is virtual community 2.0?”

13) *Adolfo Estalella “Hope infrastructure: enacting expectations in bloggers' material practices”*

In looking into the material practices of blogger, Adolfo investigates the power of blogs through influencing (public) discourses. He deploys here different theoretical concepts and approaches, such as the sociology of expectations (cf. Brown), as well as a whole range of ethnographic case studies.

14) *Sabra Thorner “Indigenizing digital technologies, imagining cultural futures: Ara Irititja*

reshapes new media in contemporary Australia”

Sabra introduces in her paper a project that has created digital ontologies, archives and repositories for Australia's indigenous people. Despite diverse challenges such as bandwidth problems, scepticism and distrust among some people, the project could manage to contribute decisively to the digital repatriation of indigenous knowledge. If this case model of indigenising digital artefacts is going to be commercially sold or provided for free to other indigenous stakeholders, has to be decided yet.

15) Discussion

The workshop ends with a final round of discussion that reminds us that with and through digital media, such as social networking sites, also negative aspects of human sociality are reproduced, e.g. stalking, privacy violations, etc.

27 August 2010: Workshop “Engaging anthropology in practice: pedagogical exchanges with media practitioners”

Convenors: Caroline Gatt, Rachel Harkness, Thomas Hylland Eriksen, Joseph Long

(<http://www.nomadit.co.uk/easa/easa2010/panels.php5?PanelID=621>)

Introducing to the workshop and its theme are Caroline Gatt, Rachel Harkness, and Joseph Long. How can anthropology engage with media practitioners and in e.g. media training programs? “Launching “Engaging Anthropology in Practice”, a project based in Scotland, this panel will showcase anthropological engagements of various publics by European practitioners in order to learn from this work and create links for future cooperation. Presentations have been requested that reflect upon the practicalities of engagement. Discussion in the latter part of the session will consider the development of anthropological training in the light of these experiences.” (more: <http://www.nomadit.co.uk/easa/easa2010/panels.php5?PanelID=621>)

1) Julia Bayer “Awareness training for journalists and its potential for the promotion of media diversity“

Julia, in her presentation, is introducing an awareness training program for journalists in Germany. This training, which is being conducted within national and international workshops, focuses on aspects of critical representation and awareness building for today's social and cultural complexities. By reporting on two different case studies, she identifies several factors that influence success or failure of those workshops.

2) Lionel Ochs “Looking at anthropology“

This presentation focuses on public questions of “what is anthropology?” and “how can it be used?”. Lionel introduces theethnographer.com (<http://www.theethnographer.com/>), a video project that presents anthropologists, their work and interests.

3) Discussion

In the discussion following the presentations, people decide on creating a mailing list about engaging anthropology that should allow for collaboration, cooperation and information exchange. More information about that to be sent out soon.